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The United Nations Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

(Not an official record or apress release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

Introduction

On 13 January 1993, Mr. Miles Stoby, Director, Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Development, briefed the NGO representatives on the UN Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, scheduled to be held in Bridgetown, Barbados from 25 April to 6 May 1994.

Prior to Mr. Stoby's presentation, Ambassador Penelope Wensley of Australia, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the Conference described the current status of the preparatory work. So far, an overall agreement on the draft of 14 chapters of the final declaration has been reached with only minor aspects still to be negotiated. The fifteenth chapter on the implementation of the conference's declaration remains to be discussed in a second preparatory meeting scheduled to be held in New York prior to the conference in Barbados.

In addition to the political declaration, to be named the "Barbados Declaration", a Programme of Action is to be adopted. Ambassador Wensley expressed her hope that this Programme of Action will be a concrete and pragmatic model for the implementation of the goals formulated at the conference.

Origins and Problems

Mr. Stoby identified the Conference on Small Island Developing States as an offspring of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio in 1992. It is expected to discuss unique problems of some 40 small island States (known as SIDS) mainly located in the Pacific and the Caribbean, a few others in the Mediterranean and off the coast of Africa.

Among the common charactaristics shared by the SIDS, he emphasized the critical importance of tourism. An essential component of growth and development which should be sustained by preserving the rich biodiversity of the islands. Connected to tourism, a wide range of problems will have to be addressed by the Conference, among them the protection of water resources, the development of infra-structure and the disposal of waste.

Many face similar problems including lack of economic diversity, vulnerability to natural disasters and fragile ecosystems. In addition, the prospect of "global warming" worries low-lying states, which face a realistic "danger of being literally washed away."

"Not a Pledging Conference"

As to the outcome of the Conference, Mr. Stoby suggested that The Final Declaration of the Conference is likely to parallel the one adopted at the Rio Conference, being fairly short and depicting in broad terms what the international community considers the main results of the conference.

The Programme of Action will serve as a pragmatic tool to commit the international community to work out the problems addressed in Barbados. It will, Mr. Stoby indicated, not only refer to the assistance that the international community intends to grant the SIDS but also fully recognize the responsibility of the islands themselves and encourage national action. Additionally, the Programme of Action will aim at strengthening regional and sub-regional cooperation.

As a further step, the international community is expected to to provide the necessary institutional mechanisms and funding support. However, Mr. Stoby pointed out that the conference is "not intended to be a pledging conference."

NGO Participation and Activities

Procedures developed for NGO participation are similar to those at the Rio conference: NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC are automatically invited and will have a chance to contribute their ideas. Other NGOs are invited to apply to be accredited to the Conference. Mr. Stoby said their applications will be handled generously. All invited NGOs can issue statements and present documents to the conference. Even though not actively involved in negotiations, NGOs are eligible to be present and have the opportunity to work with the delegations. As Mr. Stoby concluded, there are good opportunities for the NGOs to "make their voices heard."

Parallel to the conference, NGOs will have an important array of events under the **NGO Islands Forum**. Among their activities are a series of workshops, as well as the **Sustainable Development Technology Exhibition** that will showcase up to 500 exhibits, featuring services and technologies that can assist SIDS in achieving more sustainable patterns of development. The **"Village of Hope"**, a multi-facetted exhibition of ideas, presents a theme park contrasting various aspects of the negative present situation of the SIDS with suggestions for improvement. It consists of a large number of booths that hold displays on what Mr. Stoby called the "success story of sustainable development."

Information made available at the briefing:

Small Islands, Big issues -- Brochure

NGO Islands Forum -- Information Brochure

NGO Islands Forum '94 -- Registration Form